The Master of Craven

By MARIE VAN VORST

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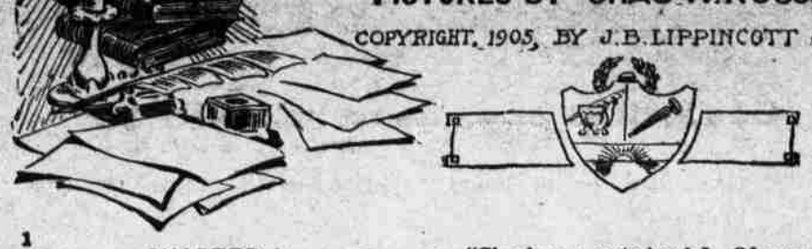

CHAPTER I.

Since Tempest had shut himself up in Craven he had added to rather than diminished his popularity. He refused to be further lionized; either timid or wise in the white heat of his fame's flame, he ran away! Rather than watch his fame fall to ash, or fearful that its tense heat would harm him? For neither reason. He was not thinking of London, or his public, he was thinking of himself.

In Craven, whilst immured, he was as well delightfully at large. The castle itself was a prison, standing, as it did, 12 miles from any railway, dominating, as it did, the entire county of ——shire. Craven was a fortress for the writer's hours of labor—a pleasure-garden for his leisure. But on this occasion he had not come to it for the sympathetic atmosphere it extended to his work. Craven was not to offer in this sojourn any of its aforetime tonic—nor was it demanded that it should suggest a new theme, or even cradle an old idea. Mr. Tempest, a solitary inhabitant of his study, asked a new balm of his retreat—it must be a panacea.

"It should be," he said aloud as he replaced a book in the shelves and found another, "a padded cell."

Into the great bow window whose squares of glass let in the whole wide country sweep to his eyes—once a veritable lover's eyes for this English nature, whose graces and beauties Tempest had made to live and bloom in his book till all England echoed his muse—into the bowed windows his housekeeper daily cleverly drew the writing-table. Tempest many times before it had seen hour after hour slip away, until, exhausted yet supremely content, he had risen, aching in every limb, the pile of manuscript grown at his hand, his work done, and he himself free and buoyant as only the creator can be before his self-appointed task. But writing materials remained these days untouched.

November had almost gone, and the drear bareness of the landscape, although not yet despoiled of leafage, was hidden on this afternoon by a mist full of rain. Tempest had the extent of blank gloom before him as he faced it by the window, leaning against his work-table, his back to the room. Something of the leaden quality of the outside reflected itself in his countenance. But he had not time to follow his meditations to their end, for a rap on the door fell once—was repeated, then the door opened and his housekeeper came in.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Basil—" He did not stir.

She waited a moment, then advanced: "I beg your pardon, sir."

After another silence he blurted out:

"Well? What for, pray? If you have any good reason to break in on me, Henly, you will give it."

"I've disobeyed you, sir."

"I'd rather forgive you than hear about it—don't do it again."

"I won't indeed, sir, but—"

Tempest turned reluctantly to the intruder. She said "Oh," involuntarily as she caught sight of his face: the last hour had ravaged it. Her evident affection, not her sympathy, modified his mood.

"What the devil have you done?" he asked, not unkindly. "It can't be worse than coming here to me after my express injunctions."

"It's worse, sir," she nodded: "I've let in a lady."

She breathed freer with the whole confession of her crime's enormity.

Tempest's surprise was as sharp as his displeasure. "A lady—you're dotty!"

She pleaded. "I couldn't help it, Mr. Basil—she had walked from Cravenford—to see you, sir—and I hadn't the heart."

"Come!" he exclaimed furiously, "I am not to be obeyed then, Henly? I see plainly you are taken advantage of—of—I mean to say you're astounding! I give orders to leave me in peace, to refuse my doors; to keep my mail, my dispatches, away, and you admit God knows whom and for what purpose at your pleasure."

She let him fume, and her patient, gentle bearing of his detestable humor made him ashamed. "What for, pray?"

"I don't know, sir," she said humbly. "I couldn't say no—somehow. She begged for a moment—she had walked the 12 miles and she says she must foot it back. It's late, too."

"She has a note-book? Of course!"

"She's a pretty hat on and a long dark coat, and she is so lovely, Mr. Basil, that I—"

She finished subtly—and triumphed, for her master slightly smiled. "It's a farce, and quite ridiculous. You've gone so far I can't drag your hospitality back—as if I had a string to it. Fetch her in."

Tempest passed his nervous hand through his hair, gave a last look to the gray without, as though he confided his melancholy to it—promising to return again for it—never fear! and came out into the room.

When Mrs. Henly reappeared she opened the door, consigned her guest quickly to the study, and withdrew like lightning for fear she should be haled to escort her out again!

The stranger deserted in this fashion looked about her rather startled. Tempest, in a black velvet jacket into whose pockets his hands were thrust, blocked up the foreground. He saw her embarrassment and that her lips were almost white. She bowed to him, still standing where Mrs. Henly's catapult-like ushering had placed her.

"I am Lucy Carew," she announced in a voice that did not waver at all.

"What Suite? What Do You Mean?"

"I have come all the way from America to see you."

Mr. Tempest started. The sudden addition of thirty-five hundred miles to the twelve was material.

"Trop aimable," he said. "I shall seem ungracious if I say that I receive no one, not even an emissary from the Cape of Good Hope." He chose at random, and as he said it its meaning caught his sensitive ear. He smiled. "You will let me be inconsequent and except that point? You see, to be frank, I have refused myself to everyone, Miss Carew (he said her name as though it were a household word) every one—friend, enemy, kind and unkind. I am a recluse—"

"I know," she accepted, "I read in the Daily Telegraph that you were. I scarcely dared expect to see you. When I got out at Cravenford and found I should have to walk 12 miles I was nearly discouraged."

"Nearly!" he echoed. "It is a tramp, even for an English girl; your countrywomen are not supposed to be walkers."

"I've not walked much before," she admitted, "and my heels are high; but when I got here it was the worst of all—your housekeeper refused me; and then"—she raised the slight veil she wore, her eyes were sparkling and disclosed no trace of it—"I cried," she said frankly.

Tempest took his hands from his pockets and extended one with the charming gesture he knew so well won him friends. For a brief second his face relaxed, illuminated. He came up to his guest. "Don't cry here," he implored. "I can't imagine what a 3,312-mile fatigue may be, but if you can rest from some of it in this chair, will you do so? I will ring for tea and lights."

Tempest understood the nature of human feeling too well not to realize with a flash how great was the pleasure of his own—and not to realize that he had never experienced quite the like sensation before. Into his outstretched hand a hand slender and strong fell as naturally as though it had waited for just this shelter ever since it had been made. He led the girl to his favorite chair, took delight in seeing her sink into it.

She had quickly undone her veil and taken it off, and he then saw the fatigue under her eyes, the pallor of her face, and withal the freshness of it. It was a luminous face, if such a term might be used—he thought it might. Her figure was concealed by a long, dark coat that rose to her neck, and she nestled into the comfort of the chair with an acquiescence of fatigue her expression did not admit. Indeed, her eyes, fastened on Tempest, were the loveliest things he had encountered for a long time.

The unconventionality of the visit, her calm behavior in it, touched his humorous vein. He slightly mocked her as he spoke, in a tone not the less agreeable and perfectly gracious.

"What wager are you winning? Miss Carew, you have won it! How much of the 12 miles did you walk really?"

She held out a small foot in a badly damaged high-heeled shoe. "A cart brought me to a cross-road and then I walked on—12 miles the man said it was, and it seemed it!"

young woman why she had come to him; he dreaded lest she should say. The moment she should ask him for his autograph the singular and piquant charm of her appartion would vanish and he would become his brutal, savage self again. This unusual visit would not bear vulgarity or even tangibility. Despite the adjustment of his eyeglass he saw her as if through a film; it added to the unreality of her presence.

"You will have tea? Perhaps you will make it for me?"

The lights had been brought in with the drawing of the curtains over the rain-swept window.

Miss Carew's hands lay inert on the chair's arms. She shook her head.

"I am afraid I can't—I am so tired."

Tempest rather clumsily made it and gave her a cup and a bit of toast.

During the few moments her host's face had clouded again. Evidently he had forgotten his guest and looked up with a start as she spoke.

"You have not asked me why I came, Mr. Tempest."

"I don't wish to know."

"Ah," she smiled. "If I don't tell you, it will be because you forbid me—and—"

"I do forbid," he said shortly, "if it's a tiresome reason—I won't say women's reasons are usually tiresome, for I am sure they never give the real ones—nothing would be so delightful, I am willing to believe, as a woman's sincere motive or reason for what she does! It's a black rose, a 'merle blanche.' Miss Carew, I've never seen any of the three."

She did not take this opportunity to remark at his psychology of feminine subtleness, but said equably:

"The result of such forbidding would be the blocking of my whole career."

He echoed the word with scorn. "Career! Heaven, you have one? You don't look it, I am glad to say—I am sorry for you," he finished brusquely.

She had unfastened the collar of her coat and it fell back. Her dress underneath was as sober in tone. Tempest rose to move aside the tea-table that was between them.

"Let me help you off with that wrap. It's warm here and you won't feel it when you go out."

He wanted to see her released from the chrysalis of her uncompromising garments. He threw the wrap on a chair, and she stood before him in a dress of some soft, dark material with white at the neck and wrists. It fitted her well, it fell well around her supple figure.

"My gloves," she said apologetically, "were soaked through. They are drying in your housekeeper's room. I dried there myself for half an hour before she would disturb you."

As she spoke there crossed Tempest's feelings, growing more and more amiable and gracious, a sudden revulsion against her which she could not have understood had he let her perceive it.

"How can I further your career or hinder it?" he asked formally.

She did not appear to take umbrage at his altered tone but, leaning forward in her chair, received him into her confidence with extraordinary facility and an assurance that was compliment in itself.

"I have been obliged quite suddenly to find a means of livelihood. To a woman of my age" (she named it, and he smiled—it was so young) "such a question coming for the first time is puzzling. Last week the editor of a well-known monthly offered me a position at a fixed and generous salary if—" here she paused.

As she talked Tempest was studying her mentality and quality of spirit as best he could, being a man as well as a psychologist, and given the fact that a specimen was very good to look at and very gently magnetic to listen to. He found her direct, and boldly devoid of weak, truckling excuses for whatever favor she was to ask—and she was evidently to ask one. He liked her clear enunciation, her soft, short sentences with the warmth under them of an exquisite voice.

"If what?" he helped her.

"If I would fetch him an especial piece of work he was eager for."

"Yes?" questioned her host, for she hesitated.

"An essay, if you like—a study of—you; of your personality. Above all"—here she flushed and lowered her voice as though the subject and her own daring awed her—"a synopsis of your new suite of poems."

Then in a voice whose sharpness struck her as if her senses had all been touched at once—she shrank at it—he asked:

"Who spoke to them of the verses?"

"I," she replied, breathless. "There were only two of them, you know, published in the winter."

"What suite?" he interrupted, glaring at her. The veins swelled on his temples. He had risen and she thought he seemed a dozen feet high "What suite? What do you mean?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Collectors and Their Hobbies.

The Repertoire General des Collectionneurs furnishes some interesting particulars of those whose pastime is collecting various objects. This De Gotha of collectors contains 10,500 names and addresses, and they are thus calssified: Autographs, manuscripts, 303; collections of pocket-books ancient and modern, 143; possessors of libraries, 4,055; lovers of books (books of the virtuoso), 486; artistic china, 839; drawings, etchings, engravings, 1,745; heraldic book plates, 374; historic military costumes, 422; natural history in all its branches (botanical, entomological, &c.), 1,452; miniatures, shells, 352; music and musical instruments, 123; numismatists, 294; objects of art of all kinds, 2,001; objects of art and of great curiosity to archaeologists, 1,168; pictures, sculptures, 1,366; fiscal stamps and postage stamps (important collections), 190; hunting, fencing, sports 244.

A Woman's Sacrifice.

Proud although the old-timer may be of such records as Igoe's and Fairchild's, it is not until you come to acts of heroism performed during historical catastrophes that his eyes grow a shade darker and sparkle. There, for instance, was Mrs. H. M. Ogle, a soldier's widow, mother of two grown daughters, who stuck to her key during the Johnstown flood, saving thousands of lives by sending warning after warning to flee into the city, and deliberately sacrificing her own life.

"Good-by, this is my last message," she telegraphed Manager Charles O Rowe at the Pittsburg office. Then the waters closed over her.—A. W Rolker.—Everybody's.